

Heath Schultz, "Debord in Watts: Race and Class Antagonisms Under Spectacle," *Lateral* 7.1 (2018).

<https://doi.org/10.25158/L7.1.6>

This content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. Copyright is retained by authors.

Issue 7.1 (Spring 2018) – Marxism and Cultural Studies

Debord in Watts: Race and Class Antagonisms Under Spectacle

Heath Schultz

ABSTRACT In this paper, I explore Guy Debord's analysis of race and racializing processes by closely examining the use of footage of the Watts rebellion in Debord's film *The Society of the Spectacle* (1973), along with a close reading of Debord's 1965 text on the uprising, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy." Debord's Marxist perspective on Watts understands the insurgents as potential revolutionary actors, primed for a "second proletarian assault against class society" (SotS, Thesis 47). To complicate Debord's position, I look at the similarities and differences between his stance and the emergent theoretical paradigm of Afropessimism, which understands anti-black violence not as contingent upon capitalist alienation but instead as gratuitous violence required to uphold the figure of Humanity within civil society.

Do I think we can make it through rioting? Do you think we can make it through on promises!? –Watts man¹

It is hard to explain to someone what it feels like to be black in a white world. The things that happen to you daily, that are very much a part of you, are hard to remember because they become so routine. There is really nothing I can tell you here that would fully let you know what it is like because it is too horrible and too deep to really communicate to anyone. –Watts woman²

Five months after the Watts Rebellion took place in August 1965, ABC News aired a report featuring interviews with several black Watts residents. The middle-aged white host informs us that by interviewing these residents, he hopes "to add understanding to the most difficult of all domestic problems in America." That problem was and is race. Beneath the populist tone, the television program reflected a tension that continues to pervade Marxism and most liberatory politics: Is race a division within the proletariat manufactured by the managerial class to fracture any revolutionary potential? Or does racism emerge from a premodern world, transforming alongside capitalism's evolution?³ With this tension in mind, we can rephrase the two quotes that open this paper. In the first quote, the Watts man suggests the Watts riot is, at least in part, a symptomatic manifestation of spectacle espousing toxic racisms and structural hierarchy. *We can no longer make it on your promises*—promises of jobs, wealth, proper housing, an end to police violence. No more promises of "progress." To put it crudely, if one reads the quote from a strictly class-oriented Marxist perspective, the antidote to this man's ailments are political-economic, and come with the overthrow of capitalism.

In the second quote, a woman from Watts implicitly situates *social death* as central to her analysis of why the Watts uprising occurred. The explosion in Watts was white society's chickens coming home to roost. Aware that she is speaking with ABC, she addresses the white world as Other in informing the listener—white society—they cannot understand. It is too terrible to communicate to *anyone*. Reading between the lines, one suspects she means that, as a black woman, she cannot be heard in this particular white venue for speech. This inability to be heard in a public venue signifies her social death. The

interviewee uses “anyone” as a stand-in for the whole of white folks because they have access to the public sphere or civil society; through this popular television program, they will hear her words and see her picture but never understand her. The routine quality of this racist horror that constitutes black life in Watts is beyond words. Inversely, it is implied that many black people understand this horrible-ness that exceeds description. This second interviewee requires not the end of capitalism but the end of white civil society.

In this paper, I will explore this tension in Guy Debord’s analysis of race and racializing processes. This project is overdue. Debord’s oeuvre continues to inform many academics, artists, and activists, yet there remains little scholarship on Debord’s understanding of race within the spectacle.⁴ I will closely analyze the use of footage of the Watts rebellion in Debord’s 1973 film *The Society of the Spectacle* (hereafter *SotS*), along with a close reading of Debord’s 1965 text on the rebellion, “The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy.” To complicate Debord’s Marxist perspective, I will look at the similarities and differences between his stance and the emergent theoretical paradigm of Afropessimism, in particular the work of Frank Wilderson, which posits anti-black violence as gratuitous violence. For Wilderson, anti-blackness is required to uphold the figure of humanity within white civil society and Western civilization.

Finally, I hope to show that Debord foreshadows an anti-state Marxism, particularly what is known as “communization” current, and may not be entirely at odds with anti-blackness as is suggested by Afropessimism.⁵ Communization is a theoretical elaboration of Marxism emerging out 1968 uprisings. While there are significant divergences within the current, communization generally shares a rejection of the Party form and a rejection of the seizure of the means of production. Instead, it views revolution as an “immediate destruction of capitalist relations of production.”⁶ With the destruction of capitalist relations, communization rejects the affirmation of the proletariat as a subject and works toward its abolition. I contend that this shift in theoretical vision from affirmation to abolition offers a non-conflictual relation to anti-blackness and allows for multiple grammars of suffering within a struggle against capital and anti-blackness.

Watts in Context

The events known as the Watts Riot took place in August 11–18, 1965, sparked by an altercation between white cops and black residents of Watts, a predominantly poor and black neighborhood in Los Angeles. The altercation escalated when a cop assaulted a community member and eventually pulled a shotgun on another. During the course of the altercation, a crowd had gathered and witnessed the events. Word spread throughout the neighborhood and the riot erupted. Thirty-four deaths resulted from the event, the vast majority of them black Watts residents killed by the LAPD. One thousand people were injured and four thousand arrested. Property damage was estimated at \$200 million, mostly white, middle-class and ruling elite properties in the 46.5 square-mile zone “where approximately 35,000 were ‘active as rioters’ and 72,000 ‘close spectators’ swarmed.”⁷ The National Guard brought 16,000 soldiers to the streets, along with the LAPD, highway patrol, and every other law enforcement person LA could find.

261 buildings were damaged or destroyed by fire . . . [In the epicenter of destruction], a three-block area, 41 buildings occupied primarily by food, liquor, furniture, and clothing were demolished. Few homes, churches, or libraries were damaged, a fact that supports the contention that the Watts Uprising was no mindless riot but rather a conscious, though inchoate, insurrection.⁸

We can also understand the Watts uprising as part of what Cedric Robinson calls the Black radical tradition, a rediscovering of “Black historical experience nearly grounded under the intellectual weight and authority of the official European version of the past” that problematized how Western radicalism understood the possibilities for revolutionary social change. The Black radical tradition involves the development of a “collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation” which “draws on the discourse of revolutionary masses” with an impulse to make history in its own terms.⁹

Debord penned “The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy” in response to these events in 1965.¹⁰ Debord begins his essay by describing the three-day revolt:

the blacks of Los Angeles, despite reinforcements, are unable to be controlled. [...] by the third day they had armed themselves by looting accessible gun stores, enabling them to fire even on police helicopters. It took thousands of police and soldiers, including an entire infantry division supported by tanks, to confine the riot to the Watts area, and several more days of street fighting to finally bring it under control.¹¹

Many of the insurgents were inspired by images of the Vietnamese guerrilla fighters in response to an increasingly militarized police reaction, including, as Debord notes, the firing of rifles at police helicopters similar to the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Historian Gerald Horne notes that there was organization precisely where one would assume there was none—in looting and destruction: “a number of persons would ride by a store in a car, get out, break windows, return to the car, and drive to another area. In their wake other cars would come by and begin to seize and load the merchandise. The burning did not start until the looting was completed in most instances.”¹² There were further signs of organization and communication between insurgents—teenagers and young adults were sighted coming out of telephone booths, jumping into cars, and heading to new locations. Destruction “appeared to be organized by reason of the types of businesses attacked and the expertness of burning.”¹³ Some insurgents broke into stores and stole clerk’s aprons to disguise themselves from police; police channels were interrupted by clandestine radio messages, etc.

Debord emphasizes that the “rioters don’t have any leaders,” and that the “leaders” of the black community, should they have had a chance, would have sold out the revolt. He does this primarily by quoting the police chief’s incomprehension at the law’s inability to mediate with a particular group that represents the black community (like the NAACP, for example). The general secretary of the NAACP, Debord reports, believes “riots should be put down with all necessary force.”¹⁴ Debord next quotes a Cardinal from Los Angeles who denounces the rioters, and especially the looters, as a “premeditated revolt against the rights of one’s neighbor and against respect for law and order.”¹⁵ The point is not that NAACP’s secretary or the Cardinal is worse than any other liberal leader or bureaucrat, it is that any collaboration with the State, with the spectacle, inevitably leads to respect for the law and order of the bourgeois society that any revolutionary is trying to destroy. Against the clamoring for *representation* and containment of the people of Watts, Debord insists that what “American blacks are really daring to demand is the right to really *live*, and in the final analysis this requires nothing less than the total subversion of this society.”¹⁶ For Debord, the revolutionary potential brought about by the insurrection in Watts was the demand to *live* and not simply *survive*.

Commodity Goes Social

Debord's analysis of race emerges from his theorization of the spectacle and the commodity. Let us then take a few moments to review Debord's understanding of commodity before we proceed to his article on Watts.

When Debord writes in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) that "the spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images," he is detouring Marx's famous phrase from *Capital*: "Capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons which is mediated through things."¹⁷ This "thing" is the commodity, which is at the center of the society of the spectacle. Marxist scholar Anselm Jappe suggests "Debord's use of 'image' and 'spectacle' should be understood as an extension of Marx's formulation of the commodity-form."¹⁸ Both the image and commodity abstract the multiplicity of experience to an equal, exchangeable form. In the film version of *SotS*, Debord elaborates this idea by dryly reading long and complex excerpts from the book version of *SotS* combined with appropriated images. For example, at minute 00:16:00 of the film, the images are as follows: union bureaucrats / half-nude, sexualized young women ("Young-Girls")¹⁹ / cars / politicians with cars / more Young-Girls / Young-Girls with commodities.²⁰ While the sequence above unfolds, we hear Debord's voice-over:

In the spectacle's basic practice of incorporating into itself all the *fluid* aspects of human activity so as to possess them in a congealed form, and of *inverting* living values into purely abstract values, we recognize our old enemy *the commodity*, which seems at first glance so trivial and obvious, yet which is actually so complex and full of metaphysical subtleties.²¹

Like Marx, Debord points out the ways concrete and useful human labor are transformed (abstracted) into a generalized form such that it can enter into the social world as equivalent to other commodities *as a mode of expression or an appearance* of use-value.²² This signals the transformation of use-value into exchange-value, essential to Marx's labor theory of value: "With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labor, the useful character of the kinds of labor embodied in them also disappears; this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labor [. . .] They are all together reduced to the same kind of labor, human labor in the abstract."²³ Debord further complicates this by detouring Marx, thereby adding a new layer to his thesis: it is not only concrete labor that is transformed, but *living values*. In this instance his voice-over is coupled with images of a nude female model, union bureaucrats, and finally a car on display in a car show. We might consider then that *images* of living values—lifestyles expressed through commodities—enter into an economy of ways of living as images *projected into* the social realm. Alienated sexuality, automobiles, and political representatives all represent a matrix of alienated as well as existential possibilities for *living* turned *commodity*. "Authentic life," like concrete useful labor, is abstracted so that it can enter into an economy of image-commodities projected above the "real world."

Detouring Marx's influential writing on the fetishism of the commodity Debord continues in the voice-over:

The fetishism of the commodity—the domination of society by "intangible as well as tangible things"—attains its ultimate fulfillment in the spectacle, where the real world is replaced by a selection of images which are projected above it, yet which at the same time succeed in making themselves regarded as the epitome of reality.²⁴

Spectacle offers the ultimate fulfillment with the abstraction of *living* values to abstract values. By utilizing an image-commodity “projected above the real world” it is able to constitute life-as-commodity. This life-as-commodity becomes the “epitome of reality” because it requires social, legal, and political infrastructures that correspond to them. That we want cars, for example, is essential to the urban organization around the individualized automobile, the consumption of oil, the nuclear family, etc. It also facilitates investment in capitalism, and thus our alienation, by offering images of bourgeois possibilities within spectacle.

Marx tells us that fetishism *attaches* itself to the products of labor when they are produced as commodities, which makes fetishism inseparable from commodity production. An attachment would supersede a simple illusion since it generates real conditions: “The social relations between their private labors appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as *material* relations between persons and social relations between things.”²⁵ In other words, “under the conditions of commodity production, producers do not relate to one another in a direct, social way; they first enter into a relationship with one another during the act of exchange—through the products of their labor.”²⁶ Debord reiterates this form of relation in his film by showing series of images depicting Young-Girls in various settings: in their bikinis at the beach, on photo-shoots, and finally modeling with a muscle car in their swimsuits. His voice-over rolls on: the spectacle “holds up to view the world of the commodity” which dominates all of experience.²⁷ The spectacle is the world of the commodity and it develops in tandem with people’s *estrangement* from one another and from what they produce.

The following sequence of the film (00:18:26) begins as follows: a shot of a factory polluting the air and the city of Venice / smoke polluting Mexico City / trash piled high in Paris with cars casually driving by / polluted water / a long sequence from the Watts Riots including burning buildings, arrests, police brutality / the French National Police being trained in street fighting. As the images progress, Debord explains in his voice-over that the commodity has pervaded the social realm brought about by the Industrial Revolution’s mass production for a global market. This encroachment upon the social via the economy created the conditions for the commodity to “finally become fully visible as a power that *colonized* all social life.”²⁸

Debord is making a double claim with his use of colonization. First, in order to expand its market, capitalism must incorporate more workers and consumers into the economy and expand its reach into new terrain. Second, the underbelly to the world where a bikini-clad girl next to the muscle car can exist is a city being polluting by a factory and trash piled up. These realities are the shadows of what is “projected” into the social world of spectacle. Debord’s shadowy footage casts light on spectacle’s excrement—it’s trash, smokestacks, and polluted water. If the spectacle is projected above the real world for us to *consume*, Debord’s figuration suggests that the “real world” beneath the spectacle is literally a place of spectacles’ shit. Debord’s use of sequencing in the film is demonstrative of his dialectical thinking; he begins with the fetishism of the commodity, followed by scenes of pollution, and finally resistance in Watts.

Representations of the Watts Insurrection against the Commodity

“Comfort will never be comfortable enough for those who seek what is not on the market, what in fact the market specifically eliminates.”²⁹

The film continues into a sequence of the Watts Riots while the voice-over describes the proliferation of the commodity society. Capitalist social relations expand exponentially because there is nothing beyond *consumable survival*. Living is within the realm of privation and the ability to survive outside spectacle shrinks correspondingly—"it may gild poverty, but it cannot transcend it."³⁰

Debord sequences the first twenty seconds of the footage from Watts as follows: cops arresting and dragging black men through the streets / cops in pursuit of presumed insurgents / cops open firing into the darkness. To summarize this brief sequence we could say the police are *active* subjects in combat. Just as Debord brings spectacle back to the ground by showing us its excrement, he suggests the Watts revolt brought class war back to street-level.³¹ Next, we see a few more images of black Watts residents arrested by police, but there is a shift: a black man who was face down on the street in a position suggesting that he was being harassed or assaulted by the police rises to his feet, apparently no longer subject to police force. In the next image we see buildings ablaze. Now the insurgents have become the active participants—historical actors.

We need to return to Debord and Marx's analysis of how the commodity-form extends into the social realm to best understand this sequence. Debord theorizes how the commodity has *colonized* all social life by tracing the historical victory of exchange-value over use-value, "only when a certain threshold is passed in the development and volume of exchange does production itself come to be defined essentially in terms of the creation of exchange-value." After this threshold is passed use-value can only be attained when mediated by exchange-value.³² In turn, we face an "augmented survival"—the inability for one to survive unless that survival is mediated by exchange-value. One has no choice but to consume the commodity because all of society's survival, as long as there is spectacle, relies upon it. With respect to Watts it is important to recognize those who are excluded from labor and the traditional working class as still subject to the capitalist economy. Debord makes this claim explicitly:

The falling rate of use-value, which is a constant of the capitalist economy, gives rise to a new form of privation within the realm of *augmented survival*; this is not to say that this realm is emancipated from the old poverty: on the contrary, it requires the vast majority to take part as wage workers in the unending pursuit of its ends—a requirement to which, as everyone knows, one must either submit or die.³³

Augmented survival becomes naturalized and the basis for capitalist social organization. Debord makes this analysis in the voice-over *while* the battle in Watts is raging on screen, suggesting the insurgents of Watts are both a reaction to and immanent to the spectacle. Debord emphasizes the victory of exchange-value over use-value which leads to the degradation of life toward "mere survival" as opposed to "living." This is central to Debord's infamous insurrectionary reading of the Watts uprising in 1965 which he understood as "as a new sign of negation that marks the failure of capitalist abundance" that foreshadows "a second proletarian assault against class society."³⁴

Debord's Racial Politics under the Commodity

Debord's writes his most explicit explanation of racism near the end of "Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy":

The spectacle is *universal*, it pervades the globe just as the commodity does. But since the world of the commodity is based on class conflict, the commodity itself is hierarchical. The necessity for the commodity (and hence for the spectacle, whose role is to *inform* the commodity world) to be both universal

and hierarchical leads to a universal hierarchization. But because this hierarchization must remain *unavowed*, it is expressed in the form of unavowable, because *irrational*, hierarchical value judgments in a world of *irrational rationalization*. It is this hierarchization that creates *racisms* everywhere.³⁵

Let's try to decipher Debord's difficult statement by looking to an earlier moment in the same essay, Debord writes "the Watts riot was not a *racial* conflict: the rioters left alone the whites who were in their path, attacking only white policemen . . . Martin Luther King himself had to admit that the revolt went beyond the limit of his specialty . . . he said 'This was not a race riot, it was a class riot.'"³⁶ How does Debord create a reading that Watts was "not a racial conflict" but simultaneously acknowledge the racialization of the Watts community?

Debord begins his explanation as to *why* Watts was the point of explosion in 1965 by noting that the Los Angeles black population is especially *separated* from the "California super-opulence that is flaunted all around them. Hollywood, the pole of the global spectacle, is right next door. They are promised that, with patience, they will join in America's prosperity."³⁷ This promise is key to the mechanics of spectacle—an image of desirable life-ways always at a distance. Debord acknowledges that black people in the US are "treated inherently inferior in every area of daily life" in a society where all power is derived from purchasing power. Monetary wealth will never make black people acceptable in America, it "will only make a *rich n****** because blacks as a whole *represent poverty* in a society of hierarchized wealth."³⁸ Here the people of Watts are located in a semiotic, and subsequently material, *structural* position dictated by the commodity's hierarchical colonization of all social life. Black people in the US can never collapse the distance between the promise of spectacle and the conditions it offers because "spectacle cannot be actualized either immediately or equally."³⁹ The black position in Debord's hierarchy functions as "the perfect spectacular object-lesson": if you don't participate in the spectacle, you, too, could fall into the impoverished position of the black object.⁴⁰ For a people to *represent poverty* those people must be policed into the real position of poverty, their wretchedness maintained as a possibility to be feared and reviled. Precisely for this reason it is this structural position which holds the possibility to destroy the hierarchies of spectacle—not through a particular program, but through the exposure and disruption of the "colonization of all social life" and its corresponding legal and political apparatuses. The super-exploited black subject of Watts becomes Debord's great hope of the "new proletarian consciousness," harboring a collective understanding that they are "not masters of their own activities or of their own lives."⁴¹ This structural position holds the possibility to negate and disrupt the rhythms and circulation of the "spectacle-commodity economy" by "demanding the egalitarian *actualization* of the American spectacle of everyday life, demanding the half-heavenly, half-earthly values of the spectacle be put to the test."⁴² By putting spectacle to the test, its promise is exposed as undeliverable. This exposure creates a break in the projected image and returns us again to the shadowy material reality beneath spectacle's imagery, only this time it is not Debord the filmmaker illustrating this reality through image juxtaposition, but revolutionary subjects in dialectical class conflict creating historical conditions to destitute the spectacle-commodity economy.⁴³

In a provocative phrase Debord reinforces the black population of Watts as potentially revolutionary actors: "In the United States today the whites are *enslaved* to the commodity while the blacks are negating it. The blacks are asking for *more than the whites*—this is the core of a problem that has no solution except the dissolution of the white social system."⁴⁴ It is unclear if Debord uses *enslaved* ironically to instigate a

comparison with the historical conditions of U.S. slavery. If so, we might read this rhetorical move as an inversion of the thresholds of captivity as they are historically understood and experienced—black folks occupy a *more* liberatory position because they can, through practical action, disrupt the “white social system,” here understood as the spectacle. Everyone under spectacle is alienated, but black people *know it* and thus become *less enslaved* than white Americans. “In this sense they are not the most backward sector of American society, but the most advanced. They are *negation at work*.” Debord hammers his point: “They appear as what they really are: the *irreconcilable enemies*, not of the great majority of Americans, but of the alienated way of life of the entire modern society.”⁴⁵

Afropessimism and Problematizing Analogy in *Society of the Spectacle*

We can expose the potential weaknesses of Debord’s analysis by juxtaposing it with Afropessimism, a theoretical orientation most closely associated with the concept of social death. First articulated by sociologist Orlando Patterson, social death is a marker of a slave relation. This relation is constituted by *gratuitous* violence and the “structural position of noncommunicability in the face of all other positions,” a void of relationality.⁴⁶ This is in opposition to Debord’s analysis, which recognizes the asymmetrical and racialized violence of the spectacle as *contingent* upon the violence inherent under capitalism. Saidiya Hartman elaborates the definition by theorizing that the slave relation is also reliant upon accumulation and fungibility—to be owned and traded, to have one’s existence defined by their captor.⁴⁷ Finally, the socially dead is marked by natal alienation, “which is to say, a slave has *no symbolic currency or material labor power to exchange*. A slave does not enter into a transaction of value (however asymmetrical), but is subsumed by direct relations or force.”⁴⁸ This subsumption expresses a despotic irrationality as opposed to a symbolic rationality expressed by the worker, whose demand might be satisfied through a victory in a struggle against capital. Recall Debord’s passage above in which he states the spectacle requires a (racial) hierarchization precisely because it is based on class conflict articulated by the commodity society’s hierarchy, and thus exists in the rational symbolic schema of capitalism. This schema generates “irrational rationalization,” a “hierarchization that creates racisms everywhere.”⁴⁹ Afropessimist and critic Frank Wilderson, on the other hand, argues there is no rational schema that explains the social death of black people in the US, it is a “despotic irrationality.” More succinctly, “one could say that slavery is closer to capital’s primal desire than is exploitation.”⁵⁰

For Wilderson, one of the consequences of understanding racism as contingent on spectacle is a construction of a new proletarian *we*, which resonates strongly with Debord’s “new proletarian consciousness.”⁵¹ The Watts uprising occupies a similar space in *SotS* (film) as moments like revolutionary Spain in 1936 and France in May 1968. Each of these moments can be understood as the proletarian subject seizing historical time *of their own volition*, not subject to the whims of capitalism or authoritarian organizations.⁵² From the point of view of Wilderson, Debord’s new proletarian subject acts as a *suture* that avoids seeing gratuitous anti-black violence as structural framework for the insurgents of Watts. This suturing, for Wilderson, is an enactment of violence by Marxism because it polices one’s ability to contemplate how the Slave—the socially dead—is exiled from the capacity to transform time and space, to transform history.⁵³ Wilderson offers that Black Liberation and the possibility of resistance is a negative dialectic—a politics of refusal, *not* an affirmation. This negative dialectic of Black Liberation is a “program of complete disorder,” of incoherence. For Wilderson this incoherence must be embraced and “allow oneself to be elaborated by it if one’s politics

are the desire to take down this country.”⁵⁴ The positioning of the Black subject outside of civil society would require a complete disfiguration of society as we know it, a total civil war that re-appropriates Blackness as affirmative and enabling rather than that of death. This is the “scandal” that brings society to pieces.⁵⁵

The social death of black people is born of the production of the Human, which is diametrically reliant upon the destruction of the Slave. Wilderson argues, “Through chattel slavery the world gave birth and coherence to both the joys of domesticity and to its struggles of political discontent; and with these joys the struggles of the Human was born, but not before it murdered the Black, forging a symbiosis between the political ontology of Humanity and the social death of Black.”⁵⁶ What this means for Wilderson is that even with a political revolution (Marxist, feminist, environmental, etc.) black people will still exist as socially dead because these liberatory paradigms are founded upon the death of the Slave.⁵⁷ Wilderson explains this in clear terms in an interview with Jared Ball:

[Marxists] wouldn't say, “Well you know, there's some good capitalists and some bad capitalists.” They would say, “the capitalist as a category has to be destroyed.” What freaks them out about an analysis of anti-Blackness is that this applies to the category of the Human, which means that they have to be destroyed regardless of their performance, or of their morality, and that they occupy a place of power that is completely unethical, regardless of what they do. And they're not going to do that. Because what are they trying to do? They're trying to build a better world. What are we trying to do? We're trying to *destroy the world. Two irreconcilable projects.*⁵⁸

From this vantage point, Debord's identification of a new proletarian subject in Watts fetishizes a black struggle and misreads social death as hierarchical subject formation within capitalism. Debord underlines the distinction and re-grounds the conversation to state violence and interpretation of that violence:

The American blacks can rest assured that as long as they keep quiet they will in most cases be allowed to *survive*. Capitalism has become sufficiently concentrated and interlinked with the state to distribute “welfare” to the poorest. But by the very fact that they lag behind in the advance of socially organized survival, the blacks pose the problems of *life*; what they are really demanding is not to survive but to *live*.⁵⁹

Recent black liberation struggles have brought attention to the fact that both currently and historically black people have in fact *not* been allowed to survive. While Debord may be right in his assertion that the Watts revolt was a demand to *live*, it is equally as possible it is a demand to *survive* from the perspective of Afropessimism. The point is succinctly summarized by the murder of Eric Garner and his last words, “I can't breathe,” spoken as he was choked to death by police in New York City borough Staten Island on July 17, 2014. Subsequently “I can't breathe” became a rallying cry of Black Lives Matter activists, tragically and poetically suggesting a condition of black life in America.⁶⁰

Debord's passage above is a testament to his inability to grasp social death, and thus his inability to offer a suitable explanation of violence in Watts. However, an alternate reading to Debord's construction of the Watts insurgents as creating a new proletarian consciousness might see Debord as trying to destroy the world of the commodity rather than trying to “make the world better” through revolutionary action, as Wilderson suggests. Situationist scholar Jason E. Smith notes that film *SotS*, made in 1973—five years after the failed revolution of 1968—illustrates Debord's atrophied belief in the seizure and appropriation of the capitalist city and its infrastructures. Instead, the

contemporary capitalist city, organized around the logic of the commodity, had become so uninhabitable, so unsalvageable, that it was only good for burning.⁶¹ Debord's emphasis on destruction and Wilderson's call for an embrace of complete disorder situates Debord's Marxism as less antithetical than it might originally appear to Wilderson's Afropessimism.

Through the Impasse? On State Violence and those "Without Reserves"

In his book *Riot. Strike. Riot*, Joshua Clover identifies 1965-1973 as a hinge in capital's transitional period from primarily production to primarily circulation, intensifying a [racialized] surplus population. Recall that Watts takes place in 1965, foreshadowing a wave of urban uprisings that would follow. This shift to circulation is important because it alters the pressure points of capital, and thus the sites of struggle. In Clover's analysis, the unemployed and/or the excluded can no longer disrupt capital at the point of production—the factory. Instead it must be disrupted at the point of circulation—the street, the port, the market, the warehouse. Among other consequences, resistance at the point of circulation will encounter the State, which is to say the police.⁶² With all this in mind, Clover writes, "Debord captures something about the overdeveloped world and its apparent abstraction. The police now stand *in place of* the economy, the violence of the commodity made flesh."⁶³ To elaborate his point, he quotes from Debord's essay: "What is the policeman? He is the active servant of the commodity, the man in complete submission to the commodity."⁶⁴ Debord's explanation of the police as *only* protectors of the commodity requires the forcible submission of the black population of Watts to the logic of the commodity, and by extension its racial hierarchization. For Debord, this policing is not an enacting of anti-black violence toward black people (Wilderson's despotic irrationality), but an ongoing containment through the policing of the subject of capital. This police action is in service of maintaining the worker/consumer subject as contained within the logic of the commodity economy. Debord also recognizes, however, the presence of police as a primary instrument of violence the insurgents of Watts experience.

Capitalism's shift toward a period that prioritizes circulation also swells the surplus population, a process Clover describes as "the production of nonproduction."⁶⁵ It is no surprise that this production of nonproduction hits the black population first and the hardest. Despite this expulsion from the workforce, the surplus population are unable to exit the matrix of the capital relation because they still require wages to live, they still need to work.⁶⁶ Clover is rearticulating a group that has been described in various ways: for Marxists, the lumpenproletariat; for Fanon, the colonized; for Wilderson, the Slave. While all diverge in analysis, each describes those "without reserves" and those who act as a negation to society.⁶⁷ Clover avoids identifying this group with a single definition to remain sensitive to particularities of context. Instead, Clover generalizes an economic trend and abstracts nonworkers as a surplus population. With Clover's abstraction, he links the colonized, the Slave, and the lumpen through a shared experience as subject of State violence.⁶⁸ This everyday contact with State violence is cause for resistance to that violence, hence Fanon's call to destroy the colonizers, Wilderson's call for the end of the world, Clover's embrace of the riot, and Debord's call for the burning of spectacle. Each share their hatred of the police as purveyors of state violence, and each embrace, in one form or another, struggle against the police as a necessary stage in the eradication of state violence. For these reasons, Clover declares struggles like the Watts revolt as having as much or more origin in slave rebellions as European labor struggles against capitalism.⁶⁹ By opening his frame of analysis to incorporate and/or remain responsive to Black

Marxism, the Black radical tradition, Afropessimism, and anticolonial theorists, Clover is able to create space for a liberatory struggle that might locate its lineage outside the heritage of European labor struggle while maintaining his Marxist analysis of the shifts in capital and the subsequent sites of struggle.⁷⁰ Clover finds a way to incorporate multiple grammars of suffering into his analysis.

Clover's analysis of surplus populations works in conjunction with his analysis of how the riot has been historically racialized in effort to naturalize rebels as lacking rationality, thus helping to determine them not fully Human. This tautology creates justification for the racialization of the riot and a subsequent justification of racialized domination.⁷¹ For Clover, the racialized production of surplus populations is evidence of Hall's well known axiom that "race is the modality in which class is lived,"⁷² and Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism as state-sanctioned exploitation of "group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."⁷³ Gilmore provides Clover theoretical footing to recognize the expansion of carceral management as a response to this crisis.⁷⁴ The riot, contends Clover, is the other to incarceration: "If the state's solution to the problem of crisis and surplus is carceral management, the riot is a contest entered directly against this solution—a counterproposal of unmanageability."⁷⁵ It is this unmanageability that excites Clover for the possibility of expanding the negation of capitalism. I will end with a discussion of Clover's idea of expanding of the riot, however it is useful to interject with K. Aarons commentary self-abolition.

Self-Abolition and the End of the World

In "No Selves to Abolish," K. Aarons gives shape to Clover's theoretical framework. Aarons' explicit task is to maintain an anarchist and communist revolutionary practice that responds to the problems presented by Afropessimism with some sensitivity. In short, Aarons is carefully trying to move through the impasse between Afropessimism and Marxism. Thus, for Aarons, the revolutionary project cannot be the program for new laws or the remaking of a new social body (what Wilderson characterizes as "trying to make the world better"), but instead should be "measured by our capacity to destitute the governmental and economic mechanisms of labor, and of the capture of life more broadly."⁷⁶ This destitution syncs with a refusal to envision a revolutionary practice as that which recovers a lost wholeness or retrieval of that which one has been deprived. The recovery of the complete self would, for Wilderson, reconstitute the schema of the Human which is animated by its anti-blackness. Aarons astutely recognizes a possibility for a liberatory practice located in the tension between autonomy and self-abolition. This is an anti-Leninist, anti-programmatic understanding of struggle,⁷⁷ one that surpasses exploitation and violence, not through empowerment or valorization, but through the "simultaneous abolition of the conditions of oppression and the social relations and the identities they produce: the liquidation rather than the consolidation of empowerment of identity."⁷⁸ Aarons underlines his point clearly:

to the extent that struggles actively refuse to validate, affirm, or strengthen the forms of subjectivity presently produced under capitalism, [. . .] these struggles can be *potentially* aligned with—or at least, *less likely to stomp all over*—the Black struggle against its own objecthood. Self-abolition therefore constitutes the only possible horizon for a non-Black struggle that does not reinforce anti-Blackness. This leads to what might be characterized as a *negative identity politics*.⁷⁹

Conclusion





The particular value of Debord's analysis on Watts is his deciphering of how the spectacle abstracts the blunt forces that support it. Debord helps us see that the police literally stand in the place of the commodity-economy. If commodity's hierarchy expands to the ends of the earth, the forces that protect it do so as well. In an era of uprisings, the State (the police) is the closest site of struggle as an extension of the economy.⁸⁰

Debord's analysis of Watts also marks a very early pinpointing of two impulses present in recent riots. Joshua Clover explains the first of these impulses to be a kind of populism that attempts to enlarge the ranks of those in the streets through public sympathy. Those familiar with internal politics of activists will quickly recognize this first impulse in those who compulsively quote Martin Luther King Jr. in order to enforce a politics of nonviolent civil disobedience with an eye toward public opinion. This often involves requiring some kind of respectability politics and commonly leads to an electoral arena.

The second impulse present in the riot is "beyond or before communication" and turns less toward a polity and more toward practicalities, or what we might also refer to as a new form of direct action. "These practicalities might include looting, controlling space, eroding the power of the police, rendering an area unwelcoming to intruders, and destroying property understood to constitute the rioter's exclusion from the world they see always before them which they may not enter."⁸¹ These two impulses are the division that describe the evident *rift* in the riot.

This rift will continue to widen and deepen because the spectacle has run out of promises —those who would "lead" an uprising for gains within the spectacle are increasingly unable to do so. Recall how we began: "*Do I think we can make it through rioting? Do you think we can make it through on promises!?*" Debord does his part to deepen this rift in vehement rejection of those who would try to control the riot or return the unruly character of the riot to something respectable, something manageable, or something governable. On the other hand, the elaboration of the rift that marks lived practice "beyond communicability" resonates with the Watts woman who opened this paper: "there is really nothing I can tell you." It was not through the ABC interview that she spoke, but the burning streets of Watts. Within the rift generated by the riot, her voice begins to sing. The contribution K. Aaron makes so eloquently to our original tension in liberatory politics is that fighting a common enemy does not mean we have the same experience with that enemy. The point is to produce moments within the rift that allow for different grammars of suffering to fight "social mediation through which Humanity and anti-Black capitalism as a whole is reproduced."⁸² The deeper the rift becomes, the more we are able to re-make our struggles *through the abolition* of ourselves as well the spectacle.


Notes







1. "The Face of Watts," ABCScope, ABC, January 22, 1966, YouTube video, posted by "retromanstv," accessed on November 10, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JqhfZV-cms> 
2. "The Face of Watts." 
3. Robin D.G. Kelly, "What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by 'Racial Capitalism,'" *Boston Review*, January 12, 2017, <http://bostonreview.net/race/robin-d-g-kelley-what-did-cedric-robinson-mean-racial-capitalism>. 
4. To my knowledge, the only direct engagement with Debord's writings on racialized subjects is chapter 4 of Frances Stracey, *Constructed Situations: A New History of the Situationist International* (London: Pluto Press, 2014). 

5. For a useful survey on communization, see *Endnotes #1: Preliminary Materials for a Balance Sheet of the 20th Century* (London: Endnotes, 2008); and Benjamin Noys, ed., *Communization and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles* (Brooklyn: Minor Compositions, 2011). [↗](#)
6. "Bring Out Your Dead" in *Endnotes #1*, 14–5. [↗](#)
7. Gerald Horne, *Fire this Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1997), 3. [↗](#)
8. Horne, *Fire this Time*, 54–5. [↗](#)
9. Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 170–1. [↗](#)
10. "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy" was originally published in in both French and English in December 1965, just four months after the riots, and distributed in the UK, the US, and France. It was republished in next issue of *Internationale Situationniste #10*, 1966. It is now available in English in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 194–203 [↗](#)
11. Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," 194–5. [↗](#)
12. Horne, *Fire this Time*, 66. [↗](#)
13. *Ibid.*, 66. [↗](#)
14. Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," 196. [↗](#)
15. *Ibid.*, 196. [↗](#)
16. *Ibid.* [↗](#)
17. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 2004), thesis 4, 12; Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 932. [↗](#)
18. Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 19. [↗](#)
19. The Young-Girl might succinctly be described by Nina Power, who states: "Behind every Young-Girl's arse hides a bunch of rich white men: the task is surely not, then, to destroy the Young-Girl, but to destroy the system that makes her, and makes her so unhappy, whoever 'she' is." Nina Power, "She's Just not that into You," *Radical Philosophy* 177 (2013). For a thoughtful look at Debord's complicated use of images of women see chapter 6 in Stracey, *Constructed Situations*. On the Young-Girl see Tiqqun, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*, trans. Ariana Reines (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2013). [↗](#)
20. This paper closely analyzes the sequencing of Debord's film *The Society of the Spectacle* (1973) to illustrate his dialectical thinking. It should be noted that Martine Barraqué acted as editor to the film and is likely equally responsible for the sophistication of the sequencing, juxtapositions, and text's relationship to the images. As McKenzie Wark points out, she was so important to Debord, she receives a title card to herself. For more on Barraqué and her importance to Debord's film works, see chapter 13 of McKenzie Wark, *The Spectacle of Disintegration: Situationist Passages out of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 2013), 123–136. [↗](#)
21. Guy Debord, Script from "The Society of the Spectacle," in *Guy Debord: Complete Cinematic Works*, trans. Ken Knabb (Oakland: AK Press, 2003), thesis 35, 54. [↗](#)
22. Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, 127. [↗](#)


23. Ibid., 128. [↗](#)
24. Debord, Script from "The Society of the Spectacle," Thesis 36, 54. Debord is building upon Marx: "A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. { . . . } But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a *thing which transcends sensuousness*." Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, 163. [↗](#)
25. Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, 166. [↗](#)
26. Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, trans. Alexander Locascio (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 73. [↗](#)
27. Debord, Script from "The Society of the Spectacle," 54–6. [↗](#)
28. Ibid., Thesis 41, 55. [↗](#)
29. Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," 199. [↗](#)
30. Debord, Script from "The Society of the Spectacle," Thesis 44, 55–56. [↗](#)
31. "To destitute power is to take away its legitimacy. { . . . } To force the police to be nothing more henceforth than a gang, and the justice system a criminal association. To destitute power is to bring it back down to earth." Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Semiotext(e), 2015), 75–76. [↗](#)
32. Jappe, *Guy Debord*, 15. [↗](#)
33. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Thesis 47, 32 (emphasis added). One can trace "augmented survival" throughout Debord's text. See in particular Theses 40, 44, 47, 150. [↗](#)
34. Debord, Script from "The Society of the Spectacle," 95. This excerpt of the film will also be coupled with a scene of riots in which "young lumpen proletarians" defend a factory from the French riot police from the rooftop, Debord, Script from "The Society of the Spectacle," 57. Following the sequence in Watts, Debord provides images of "French national riot police being trained in street fighting," followed by "More riot police maneuvers: Police costumed as radicals raise a barricade and wave black flags. Their colleagues easily take the barricade." Both sequences following the footage from Watts should be read as a dialectical and direct response to the Watts insurrection. Debord re-emphasizes it is a *war*, and the police (protectors of spectacle) are preparing and strategizing. [↗](#)
35. Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," 201. [↗](#)
36. Ibid., 196. [↗](#)
37. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Thesis 153, 112. [↗](#)
38. Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," 198. [↗](#)
39. Ibid., 200. [↗](#)
40. Debord writes: "The blacks in fact function as a perfect spectacular object-lesson: the threat of falling into such wretchedness spurs others on in the rat-race." The reference to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* is primarily the translator's doing as the original French does not share the phrase. Nonetheless, this statement is almost verbatim what we might hear from Fanon or Frank Wilderson, who I will discuss below in the second half of the paper. Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," 200. [↗](#)
41. Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," 199. [↗](#)
42. Ibid., 200. [↗](#)
43. This difference is also the political distance between Debord's *representation* of Watts in his film and his analysis and *contribution* to the struggle of Watts written in









1965. The film can only offer representation, a look backward, and act in theoretical and affective proximity to the actions of the insurgents in Watts. The film can only tell us what we can learn from Watts, it cannot start any revolutions. Only when these theoretical advancements offered by Debord are met by the *practical actions* of the proletariat can a historical break occur. Thus, Debord understood the pamphlet as an attempt to clarify theoretical confusions inherent in the revolutionary moment brought on by Watts, while the film reflects on why this moment occurred in the first place. For more on Debord's dialectical interplay between history, theory, and action see in particular Theses 131 and 203 in *The Society of the Spectacle*, 96, 143. [↗](#)
44. Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," 200. [↗](#)
45. Ibid., 202. [↗](#)
46. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1–17; Frank Wilderson III, *Red, White, & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 18. [↗](#)
47. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 21; Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black*, 59. [↗](#)
48. Frank Wilderson III, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal," *Social Justice* 30, no. 2 (2003), 23 (emphasis added). [↗](#)
49. Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," 201. [↗](#)
50. Wilderson, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal," 22. [↗](#)
51. Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black*, 249. [↗](#)
52. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (film). Debord primarily makes this argument implicitly through his use of imagery in the film. He uses each of these images similar to how he uses the images of Watts as described above. In my reading, each of these instances in Debord's film marks an unironic depiction of revolutionary struggles that offer kernels of historical truth with regard to revolutionary possibility. [↗](#)
53. Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black*, 249. [↗](#)
54. Wilderson, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal," 25–6. [↗](#)
55. Ibid. It is important to note that Wilderson arrives at this position through a belief that the black body is exiled in a social death in the face of a civil society that relies on a (white) workers dialectical relationship to capitalism in America. The Slave and subsequent black subject has never been part of this equation. While the black population has historically been the subject to resolve the over-accumulation crisis, it nonetheless falls outside of the capitalist matrix. See Wilderson, "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?," *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 9, no. 2 (2003). [↗](#)
56. Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black*, 20–21. [↗](#)
57. Ibid., 18 (emphasis added). [↗](#)
58. Interview with Frank Wilderson, "We are Trying to Destroy the World: Anti-Blackness and Police Violence after Ferguson," (ill will editions, 2014), <http://ill-will-editions.tumblr.com/post/103584583009/were-trying-to-destroy-the-world>. Interview transcript of radio interview with imixwhatilike, available at <https://imixwhatilike.org/2014/10/01/frankwildersonandantiblackness-2/>, accessed May 25, 2016. [↗](#)
59. Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy," 202. [↗](#)
60. For scholarship on this point see Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 1999). This sentiment became so commonplace at the height of Black Lives Matter that the *New York Times Magazine* ran a cover story entitled "Our Demand is Simple: Stop Killing Us," in May 2015. The complexity of the *New York Times* doing a cover story on two

“leaders” of BLM deserves its own article. Jay Caspian Kang, “Our Demand is Simple: Stop Killing Us,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 4, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/magazine/our-demand-is-simple-stop-killing-us.html?_r=0. 

61. Jason E. Smith, introduction to *The Winter is over: Writings on Transformation Denied, 1989–1995* by Toni Negri (New York: Semiotext(e), 2013), 19. 
62. Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot* (New York: Verso, 2016), 126. 
63. *Ibid.*, 125. 
64. Debord, “The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy,” 197. 
65. Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot*, 26, 165. 
66. *Endnotes #2: Misery and the Value Form*, (London: Endnotes, 2010), 30. 
67. Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot*, 160. Clover quotes and draws on Gilles Dauvé, *Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement* (Oakland: PM Press, 2015), 47. Debord is also relevant here, particularly Thesis 115 from *The Society of the Spectacle*:

Signs of a new and growing tendency toward negation proliferate in the more economically advanced countries. The spectacular system reacts to these signs with incomprehension or attempts to misrepresent them, but they are sufficient proof that a new period has begun. After the failure of the working class’s first subversive assault on capitalism, we are now witness to the *failure of capitalist abundance*. On the one hand, we see anti-union struggles of Western workers that have to be repressed (primarily by the unions themselves); at the same time rebellious tendencies among the young generate a protest that is still tentative and amorphous, yet already clearly embodies a rejection of the specialized sphere of the old politics, as well as art and everyday life. These are two sides of the same coin, both emerging under the sign of *criminality*, both portents of a second proletarian onslaught of class society. (85–6, emphasis in original).

I call attention to this Thesis from Debord to note his excitement for the potential revolutionary character of those that reject union struggles, here representative of the traditional proletarian strategy, as well as the dangerous class represented by the “criminality” Debord associates with the second proletarian assault on class society. I am not a sociologist sensitive to histories of the racialization of the criminal in France, yet Debord’s use of the term gives me pause. This point warrants further interrogation with regards to its relationship to the Other, both as a racialized figure as well as the figure that exists outside the legal infrastructure of capitalism. 

68. Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot*, 165. 
69. *Ibid.*, 165. 
70. With regard to his analysis of surplus population, Clover draws heavily from Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Frantz Fanon as well as the rich tradition of black liberation including, but not limited to, The Black Panther Party, Revolutionary Action Movement, and the Revolutionary League of Black Workers. 
71. Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot*, 166. 
72. Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 394. 
73. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 28. 
74. *Ibid.*, 28. 
75. Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot*, 162–3. 

76. K. Aarons, "No Selves to Abolish: Afropessimism, Anti-politics, and the End of the World," in *Hostis #2 Beyond Recognition* (Berkeley: LBC Books, 2016), 116. ↗
77. On the communist rejection of the program, see "Bring Out Your Dead" in *Endnotes #1*, 2-19. Succinctly, the communist program can be understood as the movement for the liberation of work by way of affirming the goals of the workers movement to seize power and therefore become the new ruling class. ↗
78. Aarons, "No Selves to Abolish," 120. ↗
79. Ibid., 121. ↗
80. Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot*, 125-126. ↗
81. Ibid., 184-185. ↗
82. Aarons, "No Selves to Abolish," 127. ↗

 [Bio](#)



[Heath Schultz](#)

Heath Schultz is a research-based artist and writer. His work addresses questions of institutional critique, activism, contemporary politics, and the political efficacy of art. His writing has been published in the *Journal of Artistic Research*, *Parallax*, and the *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, in addition to various DIY publications. His work has been shown at the New Zealand Film Archive, Auckland, New Zealand; Visual Arts Center, Austin; Experimental Response Cinema, Austin; and Plains Art Museum, Fargo, ND, to name a few. He is an assistant professor of art at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. You can view his work at heathschultz.com.

